

IN THE CLAIMS

Cancel without prejudice claim 1-8 and substitute therefor the following new claims:

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~~9. (New) A support member for a semipermeable membrane, said support member comprising a nonwoven fabric, said nonwoven fabric comprising a polyester fiber having a double refraction (Δn) of 0.170 or more, a heat shrinkage stress at 200°C of 0.10-0.60 g/d, and a mean single fiber fineness of 1.0-8.0 denier, and said nonwoven fabric having a mean value of breaking length at an elongation of 5% in a lengthwise direction (MD) and a crosswise direction (CD) of 4.0 km or more and having an air permeability of 0.2-10.0 cc/cm²·s.~~

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10. (New) The support member according to claim 9, wherein said nonwoven fabric contains said polyester fiber in an amount of 30-70% by weight.

11. (New) The support member according to claim 9, wherein said polyester fiber is poly(alkylene arylate) comprised of a diol unit selected from an ethylene glycol unit and a 1,4-butanediol unit and a dicarboxylic acid unit selected from a terephthalic acid unit and a naphthalenedicarboxylic acid unit.

12. (New) A process for preparing a support member for a semipermeable membrane, which comprises:

- (i) forming a monolayered paper web comprising a polyester fiber having a double refraction (Δn) of 0.170 or more and a heat shrinkage stress at 200°C of 0.10-0.60 g/d, and a heat weldable binder fiber, in a weight ratio of 70:30-30:70, and
- (ii) subjecting the monolayered paper web to a heat treatment under pressure to bind the fibers to each other.

13. (New) The process according to claim 12, which further comprises

(iii) laminating a second monolayered paper web or other fibrous web on the heat-treated monolayered paper web, and then

(iv) subjecting the laminated webs to a heat treatment under pressure to bind the webs together.

14. (New) The process according to claim 12, wherein the heat weldable binder fiber is a polyester fiber.

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15. (New) A process for preparing a support member for a semipermeable membrane, which comprises:

(i) forming a monolayered paper web comprising a polyester fiber having a double refraction (Δn) of 0.170 or more and a heat shrinkage stress at 200°C of 0.10-0.60 g/d, and a heat weldable binder fiber, in a weight ratio of 70:30-30:70,

(ii) laminating a second monolayered paper web or other fibrous web on the monolayered paper web, and then

(iii) subjecting the laminated webs to a heat treatment under pressure to bind the webs together.

16. (New) The process according to claim 15, wherein the heat weldable binder fiber is a polyester fiber.

17. (New) A semipermeable membrane comprising a semipermeable film formed on a side of the support member according to claim 9.

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18. (New) ~~A nonwoven fabric comprising a polyester fiber having a double refraction (Δn) of 0.170 or more, a heat shrinkage stress at 200°C of 0.10-0.60 g/d, and a mean single fiber fineness of 1.0-8.0 denier, and said nonwoven fabric having a mean value of breaking length at an~~

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elongation of 5% in a lengthwise direction (MD) and a crosswise direction (CD) of 4.0 km or more and having an air permeability of 0.2-10.0 cc/cm²·s.